

EXPANDABLE CONTAINER FOR FLORAL GROUPING

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] Not applicable.

STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH
OR DEVELOPMENT

[0002] Not applicable.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] 1. Field of the Invention

[0004] This invention generally relates to expandable containers, more importantly, to expandable containers having a housing with at least one chamber and at least one fill material.

[0005] 2. Brief Description of the Background of the Invention

[0006] Many prior art containers are constructed from relatively heavy rigid materials, while other containers are formed from flexible materials such as a plastic fashioned into rigid or semi rigid configurations. Still other containers are constructed from materials, such as cardboard, that unfold into the shape of a container. Significant disadvantages of such containers are the difficulties

encountered in erecting the containers, excessive weight, and space required to store and ship such containers and the lack of protection provided articles disposed within such containers unless dunnage is added to the interior of the container to assist in protecting the article from forces typically encountered during shipping. The disadvantages of requiring the use of dunnage in containers are dunnage compression, migration, disposal, and cost. To these ends, a container is needed which overcomes the before mentioned disadvantages of prior art containers. It is to such an expandable container that the present invention is directed.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] Broadly, the present invention relates to a container for floral groupings, the container having a collapsed condition and an expanded condition. In the expanded condition, the container includes a fill material and a housing. The housing has at least one chamber adapted to receive the fill material and at least one inlet for permitting introduction of the fill material into the chamber of the housing. The fill material can be any suitable material capable of expanding the chamber so as to move the container from the collapsed condition to the expanded condition.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0008] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a container for a floral grouping constructed in accordance with the present invention, the container shown in an expanded condition and having a pump connected thereto.

[0009] FIG. 2 is a cross-sectional view of the container of FIG. 1.

[0010] FIG. 3 is an elevational view of the container of FIG. 1 in a collapsed condition and without the pump connected thereto.

[0011] FIG. 4 a perspective view of another embodiment of a container for a floral grouping constructed in accordance with the present invention, the container shown in an expanded condition.

[0012] FIG. 5 is a cross-sectional view of the container of FIG. 4.

[0013] FIG. 6 is an elevational view of the container of FIG. 4 in a collapsed condition.

[0014] FIG. 7 is a cross-sectional view of another embodiment of the container of the presently disclosed invention, the container shown in a collapsed condition.

[0015] FIG. 8 is a cross-sectional view of the container of FIG. 7 in an expanded condition.

DESCRIPTION

[0016] Before explaining in detail, it is to be understood that the invention is not limited in its application to the details of construction and the arrangements of the components set forth in the following description (e.g., text, examples, data, and/or tables) or illustrated or shown in the drawings. The invention is capable of other embodiments or of being practiced or carried out in various ways. Also, it is to be understood that the phraseology and terminology employed herein is for purpose of description and should not be regarded as limiting, and one of ordinary skill in the art, given the present specification, would be capable of making and using the presently claimed and disclosed invention in a broad and non-limiting manner.

[0017] Referring now to the drawings, and in particular to FIGS. 1-3, shown therein and designated by the general reference number 10 is a container for a floral grouping 12. The container 10 is selectively movable between a collapsed condition (FIG. 3) and an expanded condition (FIGS. 1 and 2). In the expanded condition the container 10 has a substantially open upper end 16, a sidewall 18, a substantially closed lower end 22, an outer peripheral surface 26, an inner peripheral surface 28, and a retaining space 30. The retaining space 30 is defined by the substantially closed lower end 22 and the sidewall 18. The retaining space 30 is typically sized and shaped so as to contain a flower pot 32. The flower pot 32 may be filled with a floral holding

material 34 for supporting the floral grouping 12. Those of ordinary skill in the art will also readily recognize and understand that the container 10 and retaining space 30 may also be sized and shaped so as to contain a wide variety of other articles, such as a box, or a vase, or any other object having a mass.

[0018] The container 10, in the expanded condition, includes a fill material 38 and a housing 40. The housing 40 is provided with a chamber 42 and an inlet 44, wherein the inlet 44 is in fluid communication with the chamber 42 such that the fill material 38 may be introduced into the chamber 42 through the inlet 44. The inlet 44 and the chamber 42 are also configured such that the fill material 38 can be evacuated from the chamber 42 through the inlet 44. In the expanded condition of the container 10, the chamber 42 is substantially filled with the fill material 38.

[0019] The housing 40 may be constructed, at least in part, from at least one flexible sheet of material 43. The at least one flexible sheet of material 43 is sized, shaped, and sealed so as to create the chamber 42. The important aspect of the seal is that it substantially seals the chamber 42 of the housing 40 such that the chamber 42 is capable of containing the fill material 38. The chamber 42 is constructed of a material and in such a manner that it is substantially impermeable to the fill material 38. Examples of materials that can be sized, shaped, configured, sealed, and fitted with the inlet 44 so as to

form the chamber 42, include but are not limited to rubber, plastic, mylar, foil, treated paper or pvc, and combinations and derivations thereof.

[0020] The at least one flexible sheet of material 43 may be constructed of a single layer of material or a plurality of layers of the same or different types of materials. The plurality of layers of material comprising the at least one flexible sheet of material 43 may be laminated together or connected together by any method described herein or known to one of at least ordinary skill in the art.

[0021] The inlet 44 of the housing 40 is constructed such that the fill material 38 is introduced and disposed into the chamber 42 of the housing 40 through the inlet 44 and the fill material 38 is contained and retained within the chamber 42 of the housing 40 for so long as it is desired that the container 10 remain in the expanded condition. The fill material 38 may also be evacuated from the chamber 42 of the housing 40 through the inlet 44 so as to return the container 10 to the collapsed condition in order to conserve storage space until it is desired to use or reuse the container 10. To reuse the container 10, the inlet 44 is reopened and the fill material 38 is again introduced into the chamber 42 of the housing 40 via the inlet 44. In one embodiment, the inlet 44 may be a valve similar to an air valve typically found on an automobile, motorcycle, or bicycle tire – i.e., an air valve having a valve stem and a cap. The inlet 44 may be of the type typically found on a beach ball or other

inflatable object (such as an air mattress or pool flotation device) – i.e., the inlet 44 having a hollow tube, a leak prevention gasket, and a leak proof cap.

[0022] In the collapsed condition, as shown in FIG. 3, the chamber 42 of the housing 40 is substantially free of the fill material 38 such that the at least one flexible sheet of material 43 from which the housing 40 is constructed folds upon itself forming a plurality of overlapping folds 46. In the collapsed condition, the housing 40 typically assumes a substantially planar or flat configuration (i.e., being flattened along and in conjunction with the plurality of overlapping folds 46) to thereby provide a space saving functionality to the container 10 for convenient, economic shipping and storage.

[0023] In the expanded condition, the chamber 42 of the housing 40 is sufficiently pressurized and/or sufficiently filled with the fill material 38 to overcome atmospheric pressure, diffuse the plurality of overlapping folds 46, and expand the chamber 42 of the housing 40 to thereby articulate the container 10 into the expanded condition.

[0024] Examples of materials that are utilized as fill materials include gases, liquids, granular solids, and combinations thereof. Examples of granular solids include but are not limited to sugar, salt, plastic, metal beads, wire, sand, bicarbonate of soda, or combinations and derivations thereof. Examples of gases include, but are not limited to air, oxygen, nitrogen, hydrogen, helium,

or carbon dioxide. Examples of liquids include but are not limited to water, hydraulic fluid, mercury, or vinegar.

[0025] Typically, (and as shown in FIG. 3) if the fill material 38 is a granular solid, the inlet 44 is a hollow tube 47 in fluid communication with the chamber 42 of the housing 40 and a cap 48 capable of sealing the hollow tube 47 and, thus, also the chamber 42 of the housing 40. Typically, if the fill material 38 is a gas or liquid, the inlet 44 is a valve 49, having a valve stem 50 and a cap 51 of a type substantially similar to the type of valve typically found on an automobile, motorcycle, or bicycle tire which automatically opens and shuts in response to air or liquid pressure.

[0026] The shape of the container 10, at least in part, in the expanded condition is provided by the shape of the chamber 42 of the housing 40 and the balance between the expansive forces of the fill material 38 and the resistance of the at least one flexible sheet of material 43. It is important to note that the expansive force of the fill material 38 should not exceed the flexing limit of the at least one flexible sheet of material 43 used to construct the container 10, for example, the expansive force of the fill material 38 should not be so great so as to burst or rupture the chamber 42 of the housing 40.

[0027] "Floral grouping" as used herein means cut fresh flowers, artificial flowers, a single flower, other fresh and/or artificial plants, or other floral materials that may include other secondary plants and/or ornamentation or

artificial or natural materials which add to the aesthetics of the overall floral arrangement. Floral grouping may comprise a bloom or foliage portion and a stem portion. However, it will be understood that the floral grouping may consist of only a single bloom or only foliage. The term "floral grouping" may be used interchangeably herein with the term "floral arrangement."

[0028] The term "floral grouping" may be used interchangeably herein with the terms "plant" and/or "flower." The term "floral grouping" may also be used interchangeably herein with the terms "botanical item" and/or "propagule." The floral grouping may be cut flowers, a potted plant, or propagules.

[0029] The term "botanical item" when used herein means a natural herbaceous or woody plant, taken singly or in combination. The term "botanical item" also means any portion or portions of natural herbaceous or woody plants including stems, leaves, flowers, blossoms, buds, blooms, cones, or roots, taken singly or in combination, or in groupings of such portions such as a bouquet or floral grouping.

[0030] The term "propagule" when used herein means any structure capable of being propagated or acting as an agent of reproduction including seeds, shoots, stems, runners, tubers, plants, leaves, roots, or spores.

[0031] The term "floral holding material" may be any type of material commonly referred to in the art as floral foam or Oasis (TM) or may be soil or artificial soil (organic or inorganic) or other earth composition so long as the

material is capable of holding its predetermined shape and capable of receiving and supporting the floral grouping without any additional structural means such as, but not by way of limitation, a pot. The floral holding material may also be, in one embodiment, capable of receiving and holding water for the purpose of supplying water to the floral grouping. The floral holding material may also be, in one embodiment for example, sand, soil, fibrous material such as peat moss, or other materials used in the art of supporting plants or floral groupings. The floral holding material may also be a hollow conical or frusto-conical structure with a retaining space suitable for disposing at least a portion of a floral grouping therein, such as, a flexible sheet of plastic formed into a conical or frusto-conical configuration having an opening therein to form the retaining space and also to provide means for supporting and/or holding the floral grouping in place.

[0032] The floral holding material may be any desired shape suitable for any particular application or may be particulate, granular, or in a “gel” type state. The floral holding material is preferably constructed of a material capable of receiving a portion of a floral grouping and holding or supporting the floral grouping. In some instances the floral holding material is capable of supporting the floral grouping without the need for a pot or other supporting type of assemblies.

[0033] The flower pot 32 is provided with an upper end 52, a bottom end 54, and a substantially continuous sidewall 56 extending between the upper end 52 and the bottom end 54 so as to form a substantially frusto-conical shaped item. The bottom end 54 and the substantially continuous sidewall 56 cooperate to define a receiving space 58 within the flower pot 32. The receiving space 58 is sized and shaped so as to receive the floral holding material 34 (see FIG. 1) for supporting the floral grouping 12 in the container 10. As shown in FIG. 2, the flower pot 32 is generally frustconically shaped. However, the flower pot 32 may be any shape as may be desired in a particular application – i.e., conical, cylindrical, coniform, spherical, cubic, rectangular, hexagonal, octagonal, fanciful, or combinations and derivations thereof.

[0034] Although the chamber 42 is shown in FIGS. 1-3 as being formed between the outer peripheral surface 26 and the inner peripheral surface 28 of the container 10, those skilled in the art will also readily understand and appreciate that the housing 40 could be designed and configured such that the chamber 42 is formed between only a portion of the inner peripheral surface 28 and a portion of the outer peripheral surface 26 of the container 10 – i.e., cells may be created in the housing 40 so as to create a quilting effect.

[0035] Although the outer peripheral surface 26 and the retaining space 30 of the container 10 are shown in FIG. 1 as essentially frusto-conical in configuration those skilled in the art will readily appreciate and understand that

a plurality of different housings could be designed with each different housing providing a different configuration for the outer peripheral surface 26 and the retaining space 30 of the container 10, such as conical, cylindrical, coniform, spherical, cubic, rectangular, hexagonal, octagonal, fanciful, or combinations and derivations thereof.

[0036] Although the housing 40 is described and shown in FIG. 1 as having only one chamber 42 and one inlet 44, those skilled in the art will also readily understand and appreciate that the housing 40 could be designed and configured so as to provide a plurality of chambers with each chamber having at least one inlet.

[0037] The container 10 may have a decorative surface ornamentation such as colorings, coatings, embossings, flocking and/or metallic finishes, or other decorative surface ornamentation applied separately or simultaneously, or may be characterized totally or partially by pearlescent, translucent, transparent, iridescent, or the like qualities. Each of the above-named characteristics may occur alone or in combination and may be applied to the inner peripheral surface 28 and/or the outer peripheral surface 26 of the container 10. Moreover, each surface of the sheet of material may vary in the combination of such characteristics. The container 10 may be opaque, translucent, clear, tinted, transparent, or any combination thereof.

[0038] A decorative pattern 60, such as a color, a decal and/or an embossed pattern, and/or other decorative patterns may be applied to the housing 40 or the at least one flexible sheet of material 43 from which the housing 40 is constructed. For instance, the decorative pattern 60 may be a printed design, coatings, colors, flocking, or metallic finishes. The at least one flexible sheet of material 43 also may be a totally or partially clear or tinted transparent material. In the event the at least one flexible sheet of material 43 is clear, partially clear, tinted, or tinted transparent material it may be desirable that the fill material 38 have a color or decorative appearance for decorative purposes.

[0039] The decorative pattern 60 on the container 10 may be printed, etched, and/or embossed thereon using inks or other printing materials. The decorative pattern 60 may also be one or more decorative patterns alone or in combination. When two or more decorative patterns are present, they may be in register with one another, out of register with one another, or partially in register and partially out of register with one another. Examples of printed designs other than decorative designs include, for example, but not by way of limitation, UPC information, price information, care and handling information, and company or brand logos. An example of an ink which may be applied to the at least one flexible sheet of material 43 to provide the decorative pattern 60 is described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,147,706, entitled, "Water Based Ink

On Foil And/Or Synthetic Organic Polymer,” issued to Kingman on Sep. 15, 1991, the contents of which are hereby expressly incorporated herein by reference.

[0040] A pump 62 can be utilized to add the fill material 38 through the inlet 44 into the chamber 42 of the housing 40 to expand the container 10 into the expanded condition. Although the pump 62 has been shown as an electric pump, it should be understood that the pump 62 may be a hand pump, a foot pump, a pressurized reservoir of fill material 38 such as by way of example a pressurized CO₂ gas cartridge or a pressurized helium cartridge. The pump 62 may also include a hose 64 and a nozzle 66 capable of being opened and closed. The nozzle 66 is configured such that it is matingly compatible with the inlet 44 and substantially does not allow for the fill material 38 to escape from the hose 64 when in operable connection. Pumps, hoses, nozzles, and valves are well known by those of ordinary skill thus further discussion herein is not deemed necessary and these terms should be understood as having their broadest everyday art meaning.

[0041] In one method of use, the housing 40 and sufficient quantities of the fill material 38 (such as a granular type) are provided. The inlet 44 is disposed in the open position. The housing 40 is at least partially expanded manually by gripping the housing 40 at or near the top 67 of the housing 40 with one hand and grasping the housing 40 at or near the bottom 68 of the

housing 40 with the other hand and thereafter applying opposing forces such that the housing 40 assumes a partially expanded condition. The fill material 38 is then poured through the inlet 44 and into the chamber 42 so as to more fully expand the housing 40. A funnel, not shown, can be utilized to assist in pouring the fill material 38 through the inlet 44 and into the chamber 42. Preferably, while pouring the fill material 38 into the chamber 42, the housing 40 is partially elevated such that the weight of the fill material 38 fully expands the housing 40 and, in turn, the container 10.

[0042] After a sufficient quantity of fill material 38 has been poured into the chamber 42 so as to fully expand the housing 40, the inlet 44 is closed so as to prevent the fill material 38 from leaking out of the chamber 42. Typically, when utilizing a granular solid type fill material 38 to expand the housing 40, the inlet 44 is the hollow tube 47 with the cap 48.

[0043] In another embodiment of the use of the container 10, the housing 40 and the pump 62 are provided, and sufficient quantities of liquid or gaseous materials are used as the fill material 38. The pump 62 is placed in contact with the fill material 38 such that upon activation of the pump 62 the fill material 38 is pumped through the pump 62 into the hose 64 and thereafter to the nozzle 66. The inlet 44 is opened and the nozzle 66 of the pump 62 is matingly connected to the inlet 44. The nozzle 66 of the pump 62 is opened and the pump 62 is activated such that the fill material 38 (i.e., the liquid or

gaseous fill material) is forced through the hose 64, through the nozzle 66, through the inlet 44, and into the chamber 42. The chamber 42 is expanded by the pressure of the fill material 38 being forced into the chamber 42 until the chamber 42 is substantially in the expanded condition. After introduction of the fill material 38 into the chamber 42, the inlet 44 is closed such that the chamber 42 remains in the substantially expanded condition to thereby provide the fully articulated container 10. The nozzle 66 is thereafter closed and removed from the inlet 44. Typically, when utilizing a liquid or gaseous fill material as the fill material 38 to expand the housing 40, the inlet 44 utilized is of the type described hereinabove as including the hollow tube 47 that includes a valve stem 50 that is capable of automatically opening and shutting in response to increased or decreased pressure.

[0044] Referring now to FIGS. 4-6 shown therein is an expandable container 70 constructed in accordance with the present invention similar to the container 10. The expandable container 70 has an expanded condition as shown in FIGS. 4 and 5 and a collapsed condition as shown in FIG. 6. The expandable container 70 in the expanded condition includes at least one fill material 76 similar to the fill material previously described. The collapsed condition of the expandable container 70 is similar to the collapsed condition of the container 10.

[0045] The expandable container 70 includes a multi-chambered housing 78. The multi-chambered housing 78 has at least a first chamber 80 and a second chamber 82. The multi-chambered housing 78 of the expandable container 70 is constructed from at least one flexible sheet of material 84 substantially impermeable to the fill material 76 similar to the at least one sheet of flexible material 43 from which the housing 40 of the container 10 is constructed. The multi-chambered housing 78 has a first inlet 86 and a second inlet 88 similar to the inlet 44 of the housing 40 of the container 10. The first and the second chambers 80 and 82 of the housing 78 can be any size and shape and be formed by any method known in the art. The first and second chambers 80 and 82 may be formed, for example, by sealing an inner sidewall 90 of the multi-chambered housing 78 to an outer sidewall 91 of the multi-chambered housing 78 in a substantially horizontal line circumferentially approximately midway between a top 92 and a bottom 94 of the multi-chambered housing 78.

[0046] In the expanded condition 72, typically the first and second chambers 80 and 82 of the housing 78 are sufficiently pressurized and/or sufficiently filled with the fill material 76 to overcome atmospheric pressure, thereby, expanding the first and second chambers 80 and 82. The expandable container 70 in the expanded condition 72, has a substantially open upper end 96, the inner sidewall 90, the outer sidewall 91, a lower end 102 which is

substantially closed, a retaining space 104 defined by the inner sidewall 90 and the lower end 102, an outer periphery 106 substantially defined by the outer sidewall 91 and the lower end 102, and an inner peripheral surface 108 substantially defined by the lower end 102 and the inside sidewall 98. It should be noted that a hole 110 optionally extends through the lower end 102 to allow for drainage of water or other liquids from the retaining space 104. The multi-chambered housing 78 of the expandable container 70 is configured such that the hole 110 in the lower end 102 of the expandable container 70 does not allow fill material 76 to escape from the chambers 80 and 82. The retaining space 104 is similar to the retaining space 30 of the container 10 and is also typically sized and shaped to contain or cover a floral grouping 112, a floral holding material 114, a flower pot (not shown), or combinations and derivations thereof.

[0047] The shape of the expandable container 70, at least in part, in the expanded condition 72 is provided by the shape of the first and second chambers 80 and 82 formed in the multi-chambered housing 78, the configuration and weight of the floral grouping 112, floral holding material 114 and/or flower pot disposed in the retaining space 104, the horizontal, vertical, diagonal, or arcuate orientation of the chambers 80 and 82, the expansive forces of the fill material 76 disposed within the first and second chambers 80 and 82, and the resistance of the at least one sheet of flexible material 84.

Those skilled in the art will readily recognize and understand that the multi-chambered housing 78 can include any number of chambers.

[0048] In this embodiment of the expandable container 70 the first chamber 80 and the second chamber 82 each surround a portion of the retaining space 104 of the expandable container 70. For instance, by sealing the inner sidewall 90 of the multi-chambered housing 78 to the outer sidewall 91 of the multi-chambered housing 78 in a substantially horizontal line circumferentially approximately midway between the open upper end 96 and the lower end 102 of the multi-chambered housing 78 the first chamber 80 is created and the second chamber 82 is created. It should be noted the first chamber 80 can be filled with a first fill material 122 such as a gas and the second chamber 82 can be filled with a second fill material 124, different from the first fill material 122 such as a granular solid for decorative or functional purposes. For instance, the second chamber 82, may be constructed of a transparent material and filled with a colored granular solid or a colored liquid in order to provide stability and a decorative effect to the expandable container 70 and the first chamber 80 may be filled with a gas to provide a smooth outer periphery 106 to the upper portion of the expandable container 70.

[0049] It should also be noted that although the expandable container 70 is shown and described as having first and second chambers 80 and 82, any

number of chambers may be formed in the multi-chambered housing 78 in either a horizontal orientation and/or in a vertical orientation.

[0050] Referring now to FIGS. 7 and 8 shown therein is a self inflating expandable container 130 constructed in accordance with the present invention similar to the expandable container 10. The self inflating expandable container 130 has an expanded condition as shown in FIG. 8 and a collapsed condition as shown in FIG. 7. The collapsed condition of the self inflating expandable container 130 is similar to the collapsed condition of the container 10. The self inflating expandable container 130 includes a multi-chambered housing 136 and at least a first fill material 138 and a second fill material 140. The multi-chambered housing 136 is constructed of at least one flexible sheet of material 141 similar to the at least one flexible sheet of material 43 used to construct the housing 40.

[0051] The multi-chambered housing 136 has an outer chamber 142 and an inner chamber 144 disposed within the outer chamber 142. The first fill material 138 is disposed in the inner chamber 144. The second fill material 140 is disposed in the outer chamber 142. The first fill material 138 and the second fill material 140 are capable of producing a chemical reaction when they contact each other thereby producing an amount of gas, foam, or solid or semi-solid material to inflate the multi-chambered housing 136 into the expanded condition 132.

[0052] The inner chamber 144 is constructed, at least in part, of a material and of a thickness such that the inner chamber 144 will break, rupture, tear, or separate without disrupting or disturbing the outer chamber 142 and before the outer chamber 142 breaks, ruptures, tears, or separates when similar forces are applied to the inner chamber 144 and the outer chamber 142. The material from which the inner chamber 144 is constructed can include one or more separating elements 150. The separating elements 150 are impermeable to the first and second fill materials 138 and 140 when the separating elements 150 are intact. The separating elements 150 can be, for instance, thin or weakened areas or weakened seals, indentations, or combinations and derivations of the same designed to facilitate and insure that the inner chamber 144 breaks, ruptures, tears, or separates before the outer chamber 142 breaks, ruptures, tears, or separates when the inner chamber 144 and the outer chamber 142, are placed under similar simultaneous pressures, forces, or stresses. The first fill material 138 and the second fill material 140 are isolated from each other until the inner chamber 144 is selectively broken, ruptured, torn, or separated by an operator. The breaking, rupturing, tearing, or separation of the inner chamber 144 allows the first fill material 138 and second fill material 140 to combine and mix.

[0053] The first fill material 138 is a first chemical and the second fill material 140 is a second chemical that, when combined, produce an expanding

reaction which results in an expanding material 151. Such chemical combinations are well known in the art. The selection, quantity, and concentration of the first and second fill materials 138 and 140 are dependent, among other things, upon the amount of expanding material 151 desired. For example, the first fill material 138 may be manganese dioxide and the second fill material 140 could be an aqueous solution of hydrogen peroxide or the first fill material 138 could be sodium bicarbonate and the second fill material 140 could be acetic acid. Preferably, the first and second fill materials 138 and 140 are selected so as to not chemically react with each other at a high temperature, nor produce a gas which could damage the multi-chambered housing 136, or which could be harmful to humans and/or animals if exposed thereto.

[0054] The first and second fill materials 138 and 140 could be artificially colored for a decorative effect in the event the outer chamber 142 and/or inner chamber 144 or any portions thereof are transparent or translucent. Coloring agents such as food coloring, dyes, and paints are well known in the art and need not be described herein.

[0055] In the expanded condition the outer chamber 142 is sufficiently pressurized or sufficiently filled with the expanding material 151 to overcome atmospheric pressure, expand the outer chamber 142 and thereby expand the multi-chambered housing 136.

[0056] The self inflating expandable container 130 in the expanded condition has a substantially open upper end 152, an inside sidewall 154, an outside sidewall 156, a substantially closed lower end 158, a retaining space 160 defined by the inside sidewall 150 and the closed lower end 158, an outer peripheral surface 162 substantially defined by the outside sidewall 156 and closed lower end 158, and an inner peripheral surface 164 substantially defined by the closed lower end 158 and the inside sidewall 154. The retaining space 160 is typically sized and configured to contain or cover a floral grouping, a floral holding material, a flower pot, or combinations and derivations thereof similar to the floral grouping 12, floral holding material 34, and flower pot 32 previously described and shown.

[0057] In use, the multi-chambered housing 136 with the first fill material 138 in the inner chamber 144 and the second fill material 140 in the outer chamber 142 is provided. The operator applies a compressive force to the multi-chambered housing 136 of sufficient magnitude (such as a squeezing between one or two hands) to cause the inner chamber 144 to rupture but of insufficient magnitude to cause the outer chamber 142 to rupture. As the inner chamber 144 with the first fill material 138 ruptures the first fill material 138 flows from the inner chamber 144, mixes with the second fill material 140 in the outer chamber 142, and produces the expanding material 151 thereby

causing the multi-chambered housing 136 to expand and provide the self inflating expandable container 130 in its expanded condition.

[0058] Thereafter, an item, such as the flower pot 32, the floral holding material 34, and the floral grouping 12, can be disposed into the retaining space 160 of the self inflating expandable container 130.

[0059] Changes may be made in the various elements, components, parts, and assemblies described herein or in the steps or sequences of steps of the methods described herein without departing from the spirit and the scope of the invention as defined in the following claims.

[0060] From the above description, it is clear that the present invention is well adapted to carry out the objects and to attain the advantages mentioned herein as well as those inherent in the invention. While presently preferred embodiments of the invention have been described for purposes of this disclosure, it will be understood that numerous changes may be made to various elements, components, parts, and assemblies described herein or in the steps or sequences of steps of the methods described herein which will readily suggest themselves to those skilled in the art without departing from the spirit and the scope of the invention as defined in the appended claims.